



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Health Administration
Washington DC 20420

IL 10-2005-024

In Reply Refer To: 10A2A

December 7, 2005

UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER

THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S DIVERSITY AWARDS PROGRAM

1. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) provides comprehensive health care services to America's heroes, the former servicemen and women who represent the great diversity of America. These veterans come from all walks of life including wide-ranging racial, ethnic, socio-economic, physical ability, and cultural experiences. A coordinated and comprehensive approach to diversity management facilitates development of a strong and inclusive work force; fosters an environment of respect, fairness, and opportunity for employees; enhances veterans' health care experiences and outcomes; and increases customer satisfaction. Creating an organizational climate that respects and values diversity is a business imperative crucial to VHA's continued success.
2. Established in 1993, under the guidance of the Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Advisory Board, this awards program recognizes the successes of VHA program offices, Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISNs), and/or medical center programs in achieving results through diversity management approaches.
3. The most effective diversity management is not defined nor deployed as a specific initiative or a special program. Instead, diversity management utilizes a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to implementing processes to build supportive infrastructure and program practices which respect, and capitalize on, the strengths found in diversity. The Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Awards recognize programs within the organization which serve as a positive role model for other facilities in demonstrating support for diversity, empowering employees and/or teams, and enhancing veterans' health care experiences and outcomes.
4. Any VHA facility, VISN, or VHA Central Office Program Office with developed program approaches or initiatives designed to increase awareness of diversity and improve diversity within the organization is eligible for this award. Each applicant is to submit a nomination package detailing information on their diversity program, its unique approaches, outcomes, and key strategies for success. *NOTE: Diversity programs are not to be confused with required special emphasis programs.*

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5. The Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Awards are designed to recognize innovations and successes in diversity programs throughout FY 2005.

a. **Level One Award.** The Level One Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Award is designed to recognize innovations, achievements, and successes of a comprehensive Diversity Management Program.

b. **Level Two Award(s).** Recognizing that many in VHA are developing their diversity programs, additional recognition awards may be granted to programs demonstrating significant development and/or achievement in the following key components (derived from benchmarks with top companies in the United States measuring diversity programs):

- (1) Workforce Development and Succession Planning.
- (2) Leadership Initiatives and Governance Practices.
- (3) Business Practices.
- (4) Cultural Competency.

6. Nominations are being accepted for the Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Awards Program until December 16, 2005. The Award Criteria and nomination format are included in Attachment A. The nomination package needs to include a signed endorsement from the facility, VISN, or program office Director and be submitted to Danita.Bearden@va.gov or by mail to:

Ms. Danita Bearden (10A2A)
Management Support Office
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

7. The FY 2005 Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Award winners receive a cash award and either a trophy or plaque, depending on awarded level, in recognition of their achievement. The Award Committee is comprised of members from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Diversity Management and Equal Employment Office, the Center for Minority Veterans, and VHA senior leaders. The Award Committee reviews all nomination packages and makes recommendations to the Under Secretary for Health, who selects the Award winners. ***NOTE:*** *The selection of the winners depends fully on the information provided in the nomination package.*

8. Questions may be directed to Ms. Rosalyn L. Cole, Chair, Special Initiatives, Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Advisory Board, at 701-239-3702, or by e-mail to Rosalyn.Cole@va.gov.

S/Jonathan B. Perlin, MD, PhD, MSHA, FACP
Under Secretary for Health

Attachment

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ATTACHMENT A

**AWARD CRITERIA AND NOMINATION FORMAT FOR THE UNDER SECRETARY
FOR HEALTH'S DIVERSITY AWARDS PROGRAM**

1. Nominations are due no later than December 16, 2005, and may be submitted electronically. Nominations received after that date will not be considered. The nomination package must include a signed endorsement from the facility Director, the Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) Director, or the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Central Office program office Director when it is submitted to Danita.Bearden@va.gov or via mail to:

Ms. Danita Bearden (10A2A)
Management Support Office
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

2. Complete the following for each Award nomination submitted:

a. List the name and address of the facility, VISN or VHA Central Office program office being nominated.

b. List the name, title, address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address for the designated Point of Contact for the nomination submitted.

c. Indicate the Award level and component for the nomination (indicate only one Award Level; if applying for more than one level or component, a separate nomination package is necessary for each):

(1) **Level One Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Award for the Comprehensive Diversity Management Program** The Level One Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Award is designed to recognize innovations, achievements, and successes of a VHA facility, VISN, or VHA Central Office program office's comprehensive diversity management program. Nominations are evaluated on their demonstrated successful implementation of diversity management throughout their organizational structure, including the deployment of the key elements of a comprehensive diversity management program noted below. A fully-deployed comprehensive diversity management program identifies their scope and innovation in developing and supporting systematic processes and practices actively supporting diversity awareness and acceptance; workforce diversity; culturally competent practices; and operational processes integrating diversity management.

(2) **Level Two Under Secretary for Health's Diversity Awards**. Recognizing that many in VHA are developing their diversity programs, additional recognition Awards may be granted to programs demonstrating development and achievement in the following key components of a diversity management program:

(a) **Component A: Workforce Development and Succession Planning.** This component includes successful programs and approaches to creating opportunities for women, minorities and people with disabilities in reaching their potential and readiness for higher-level responsibilities for tomorrow's workforce. Nominations are evaluated for their scope and innovation in developing and supporting initiatives that support professional development, leadership development, continuous learning, career counseling and/or succession planning.

(b) **Component B: Leadership Initiatives and Governance Practices.** This component includes inclusive governance structures, leadership approaches and operations that embrace diversity and diversity management as a fundamental element in all processes, procedures, and practices. Nominations are evaluated for their demonstrated involvement of senior leadership in diversity councils or boards, for their governance structure incorporation of diversity management into strategic and business plans, and their championship of diversity programs.

(c) **Component C: Business Practices.** This component includes successful strategies and systematic processes for seeking out and developing diverse suppliers and contracting with vendors through women, minority, small and veteran-owned business to support business operations.

(d) **Component D: Cultural Competency.** This component includes innovative and creative approaches in development of cultural awareness and appropriate cultural competency in all levels of staff; it may include the development of clinical training or tools which promote the concept of culturally competent care and improved quality of care for veterans and their families.

d. Prepare a three-page description of the initiative, program, and/or activity identifying the following:

(1) Senior leadership involvement in planning, implementation, on-going support, and evaluation of the initiative, program and/or activity.

(2) Stated goals of the diversity initiative, program and/or activity and their integration in, or support of, the organization's strategic goal(s) for diversity.

(3) Demonstrated outcomes or impact the initiative, program and/or activity is having on the organization and its employees.

(4) Visibility and accessibility of the initiative, program and/or activity within the organization.

(5) Process used to ensure continuous improvement and feedback regarding the impact of the program.

e. Complete the nomination package with a signed endorsement from the facility Director, VISN Director, or VHA Central Office program office responsible for the program which was nominated.